

CONCERTO FOR TROMBONE

by Buxton Orr

When I joined the staff of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 1965, I was anxious to add some practical activity to my work with General Musicianship. As no-one was at the time coaching brass ensembles, I took on the task of learning the repertoire and giving concerts, attempting to justify the fact that I was not a brass player by writing two brass quintets: one of them lightweight, a *Divertimento* (pub. Novello); and another, more ambitious, a *Sonata for Brass* (pub. R. King, now Leduc).

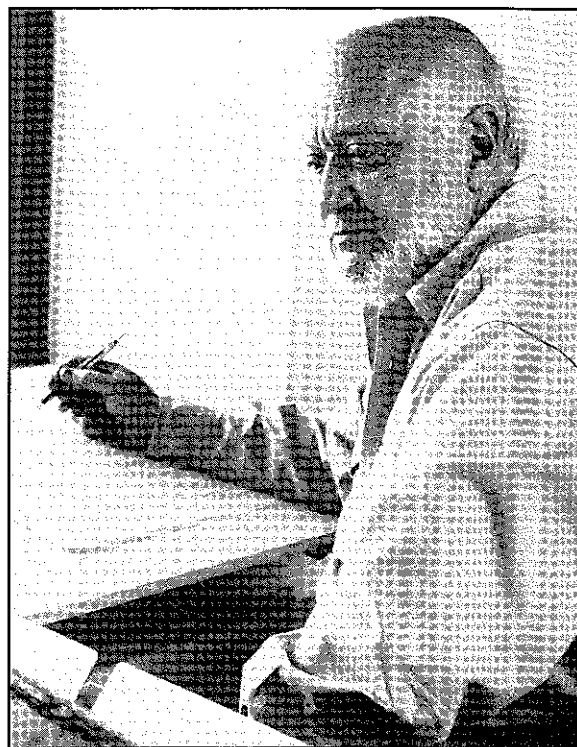
When Denis Wick joined the staff, instead of getting my come-uppance, we got on famously, both professionally and personally. I wrote *Five Sketches for Four Trombones* for him, and he arranged for the British Federation of Brass Bands (with funds provided by the Arts Council) to commission from me the present *Concerto* (pub. Novello).

It was first performed by Denis on the 28th April 1973 in Durham Cathedral with the Ever Ready (GB) Band, conducted by Harry Mortimer. It was a great experience for me to have such a fine soloist, and I have special affectionate memories of the great trouble Harry took to solve some conducting problems presented by the second movement.

The *Concerto* was originally written for brass band - and I still think with shame of my original score, written in a cowardly concert pitch short score, unable as I was then to cope with what seemed to me the lunacy of the treble clef tradition!

More recently the Californian trombonist, Miles Anderson, took the work up, and I made a version with Symphonic Wind Band, yet to be performed in this country.

The work is in two separate but related movements. Each can be performed individually: as *Concert Piece for Trombone and Brass Band* (or SWB), and *Passacaglia for Trombone and Brass Band* (or SWB).



FIRST MOVEMENT

The long, lyrical melody with which the work opens has, at its head, a four note motif, out of which grows much of the melodic and harmonic content of the piece (Ex. 1).

Notice how the band foreshadows the general shape of the motif in the few bars that lead in to the entrance of the soloist. The performers have the problem of keeping the melody flexible and free, without impeding the forward moving quaver movement of the accompaniment.

At the end of this widely modulating melody, a similar lead-in takes the music into a faster *Tempo II*, in which semiquaver movement establishes a more agitated character. By bar 48 this has settled into a regular and consistent figuration (Ex. 2).

Ex. 1 Andante con moto (Tempo I)

Ex. 2 Tempo II (Più mosso)

ANALYSIS

Ex. 3

(Tempo II)

Ex. 4

Ex. 5

The expansion of this leads to an aggressive *tutti*, whose development combines semiquaver movement and the shape of the main motif in a polytonal climax (Ex 3)

It is important that the relaxed response of the unaccompanied soloist to the end of this *tutti* (bar 86) should be strictly in tempo, so that the ensuing calm dialogue with the band leads into the short *cadenza* that, via a throbbing pedal D on trombones, takes us back to the opening lead-in.

A compressed recapitulation takes different melodic and harmonic directions to the rhetorical climax, in which the main motif, started off with pedal notes by the soloist, ascends the texture, in augmentation and canon, to a polytonal climax, the final chord juxtaposing Bb major - the main tonic - with A major, a harmonic consequence of the E natural of the motif (Ex 4).

As I write this, I notice for the first time that simultaneous sounding of all four notes of the motif - appropriately spaced - gives the essence of this chord. Schoenberg is alive and well, even in tonal music!

On the way to this climax much development and elaboration takes place, and here it was that I asked Denis for one of his 'tricks'. He offered me the lip glissandi used in bars 166-170. As a non brass player I have no idea how tricky they are, so here, not available in the printed part, I offer an alternative (Ex 5). I hope this doesn't turn out to be more difficult!

Ex. 6

LENTO

SECOND MOVEMENT

The stately Chorale which forms the basis of the Passacaglia is shown in outline in Ex. 6. The various brackets show the motivic structure of the melody, and inspection of the bass line reveals it to contain all twelve chromatic notes. The movement is in no sense a 12 note serial piece (as is my *Trumpet Concerto*) except in a Pickwickian (or Bergian!) sense. This can be heard by harmonising the two parts with the triads indicated by the chord symbols given, as in the piece itself.

Throughout the movement the double bars indicate the often strongly contrasted sections into which the repetitions of the *Passacaglia* fall. The chief performance difficulty is to preserve the continuity despite the contrasts, above all in bar 100 onwards.

Here the musical instinct of the conductor and strict observance of the tempo markings should prevent the design from falling apart. Various solos in the band lead into the extended *cadenza* for the soloist, who meditates freely on either fast figuration, or a lyrical shape that gradually reminds us of the motif of the first movement.

The soloist then starts a martial tread, soon joined by the percussion section, which seems to lead into a third movement. It is, in fact, a further section of the *Passacaglia*, whose development leads into many and varied references to the opening of the work, and a firm conclusion in a tonally unambiguous Bb.

The Glasgow-born composer Buxton Orr gave up a career in medicine in the early 1950s to study composition with Benjamin Frankel and conducting with Aylmer Buesst. His early professional work was in films (Karloff horrors, *Suddenly Last Summer*) and in the theatre (including the original production of *Flowering Cherry*).

Later his compositions included songs, chamber music, works for Brass and Wind Band, orchestral music and a one-act opera *The Wager*. In 1965 he joined the staff at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and in 1975 founded the Guildhall New Music Ensemble. Between 1970 and 1980 he was conductor of the London Jazz Composers' Orchestra, touring England and Europe and taking part in the 1972 Berlin Jazz Festival.

He has received commissions from Glasgow University, the Saltire Society, the Park Lane Group, the BBC, Radio Scotland, the City of London Festival and Merseyside Arts.

His interest in music-theatre led to his writing *Unicorn*, *The Last Circus* and *Ring in the New*, the latter during his period as Composer-in-Residence and Associate Director of the Music Theatre Studio Ensemble at the Banff Centre for Fine Arts in Canada, and for which he and Michael Bawtree were awarded the Seagrams Prize of the American National Music Theatre Network in 1988.

In 1990 he gave up regular teaching to devote more time to composition and now lives in the Wye Valley.

Buxton Orr

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Buxton Orr's works for Wind are:	
A John Gay Suite (1972)	Publ: Novello 15 mins Grade 4/5
Concerto for Trombone (1971)	Publ: Novello 17 mins (also with Brass Band)
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